OUT OF THE BOXES (AND INTO THE CHANGES)

LEAD

play the whole neck: go diagonal

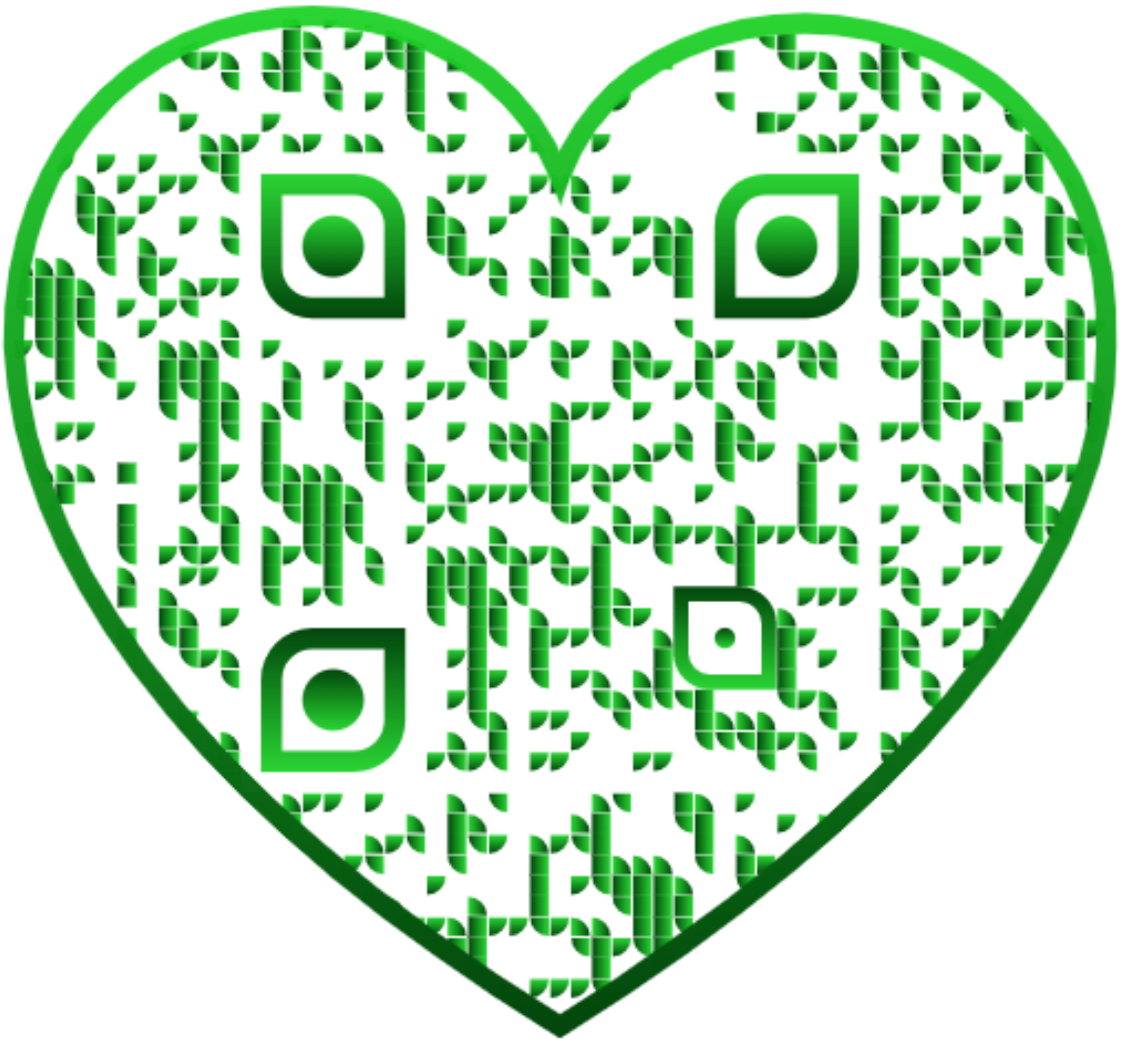
Many people begin to play lead guitar by learning one or more "box positions" of the pentatonic scale. The problem is, once you've got a few of those trusty pentatonic positions under your fingers, it seems like you can't get away from them. We're going to look at some ways to get "out of the box," that is, to exit the familiar pentatonic blues box and open up the entire fretboard for soloing.

Along the way we'll look at some ideas for doing more than just blowing one scale over all three chords of a I-IV-V blues. Sneaking in a few key notes here and there can create the feeling of "playing the changes," of really treating each chord change as a distinct musical moment with its own identity.

Get sideways

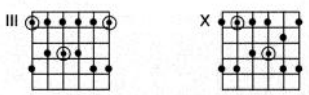
Ex. 1 shows the boxes for the two pentatonic fingerings you're probably the most familiar with. Now let's look at minor pentatonic in a slightly different way—what you might think of

by David Hamburger



as a "diagonal" approach to the scale. In the first fingering of *G*-minor pentatonic (**Ex. 2a**), the roots, or *G*s, show up on the sixth, fourth, and second strings. In the second fingering (**Ex. 2b**), the roots show up on the fifth, third, and first strings. In both fingerings, the root is played by either your pinky or ring finger.

Ex. 1



There are several advantages to using these fingerings. The first is that there are only two fingerings to remember, instead of the "five boxes" located along the neck. The second is that these fingerings are designed to emphasize the roots of the scale, helping you to stay oriented when you improvise and to see the fretboard in terms of octaves and thus understand it better. Finally, you are now using almost the same fingerings to play minor pentatonic in every register, which makes transposing licks and moving from register to register much easier.

Check out **Ex. 3**. It's a lick that falls naturally under your fingers in the first position pentatonic box. With the diagonal pentatonic scale, you can find the same licks all over the fretboard using just one left-hand fingering based around the root.

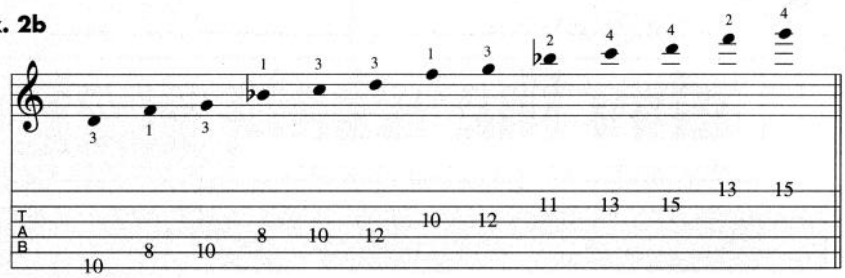
The key to making this idea work is to practice connecting the various positions by sliding from the 4 to the 5 of the scale. **Ex. 4** climbs from the first to the sixth position while remaining within *G*-minor pentatonic. Note the slides from the 3rd to the 5th fret on the *A* string going from measure 1 into measure 2, and from the 5th to the 7th fret on the *G* string in the middle of measure 3. **Ex. 5** is a descending run from thirteenth to eighth position. This time the slides are from *D* to *C* (5 to 4 of *G*-minor pentatonic), first as you go from the 15th to the 13th fret on the *B* string in measure 1, and then from the 12th to the 10th fret on the *D* string in measure 3.

Third degree

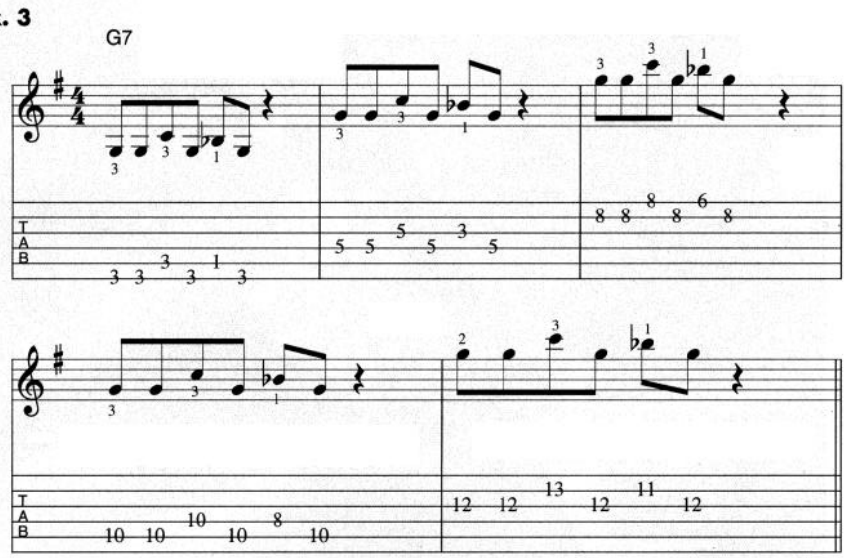
Getting out of the pentatonic rut is just as much about careful note choice as it is about fretboard position. Articulating the ♭3 of the

Ex. 2a

Ex. 2b



Ex. 3

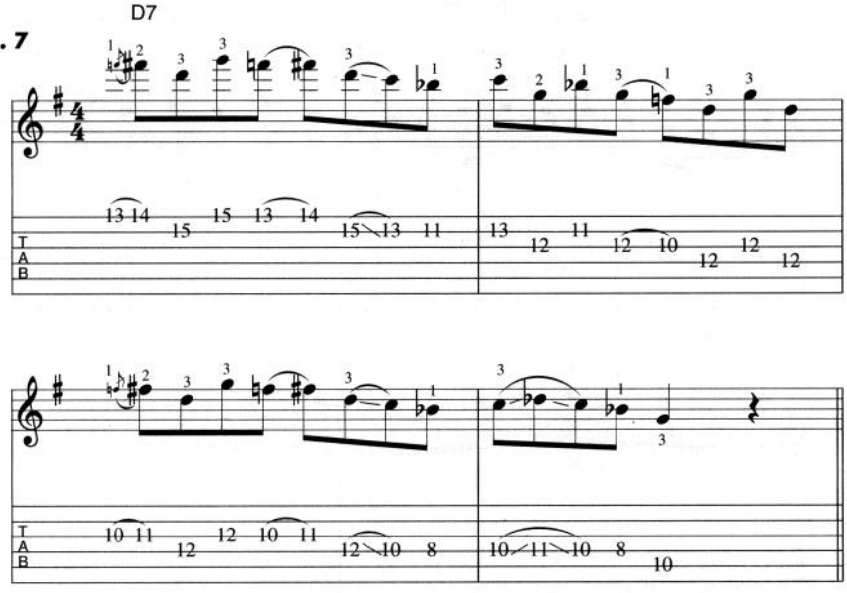


Ex. 4

Ex. 5

Ex. 6

Ex. 7



chord you're playing over can go a long way towards telegraphing "the changes" to the listener's ear—even more so than playing the root. Most people use minor pentatonic to play over the blues, which means that on the I chord you're playing minor pentatonic against a dominant-7th chord of the same root. In other words, on a *G* blues, you're playing *B♭*, the ♭3 in the key of *G*, as part of the *G*-minor pentatonic scale, over *G7*, which includes a *B♮*, the ♮3 in the key of *G*. **Ex. 6** shows one way of adding *B♮* to a *G*-minor lick using a hammer-on. With the diagonal fingerings this move is relatively easy to work in throughout the fretboard, once your brain and fingers grasp the basic idea.

This approach can also be applied over the V chord, by adding its ♮3 to the tonic minor pentatonic scale. For example, in a *G* blues the V is *D7*, and the ♮3 of *D7* is *F#*. **Ex. 7** includes hammer-ons to *F#* within a *G*-minor pentatonic scale at the 14th fret on the high-*E* string in measure 1, and at the 11th fret on the *G* string in measure 3.

Three at once

Triads can also help you get around the fretboard. Temporarily limiting yourself to the major triads on the fourth, third, and second strings can give you a way to outline the important tones for soloing. Triads offer compact sets of easily remembered shapes. **Ex. 8** shows the three *G*-major triads available on strings four, three, and two.

With a little juggling, these same three shapes can be re-used to get similar voicings for the IV (*C*) and V (*D*) chords. The resulting sets of *C* and *D* triads, shown in **Ex. 9**, lie in roughly the same three registers as the three *G* voicings. As with the pentatonic scale, it just takes adding a few notes to change these triad arpeggios into something much more musical, while still using the same basic shapes as reference points. Climbing up the *G*-major arpeggios over a I chord, add in *A* and *E*, the 2 and 6 of *G*, to get a complete *G*-major pentatonic scale. Borrow a *B♭*, the ♭3 from the minor pentatonic, as you slide into the ♮3 (*B♮*), and you've got the groovy, countrified licks that make up **Ex. 10**.

Combining the triads of two different chords lets you emphasize a particular chord change, like from I to IV or from I to V. **Ex. 11** illustrates

a handful of triad-based moves from I to IV as you ascend the neck. By starting at measure 2, you could also use these licks to get from IV back to I. **Ex. 12** is a series of moves from I to V as you descend in position, dressed up with a few slick chromatic moves. Note the numerous half-step slides into either *B♮* (over the I chord) or *F#* (over the V chord), the chromatic move of 3-4-#4-5 at the beginning of measure 2, and the classic blues move of root-2-♭3-♮3 at the beginning of measure 5.

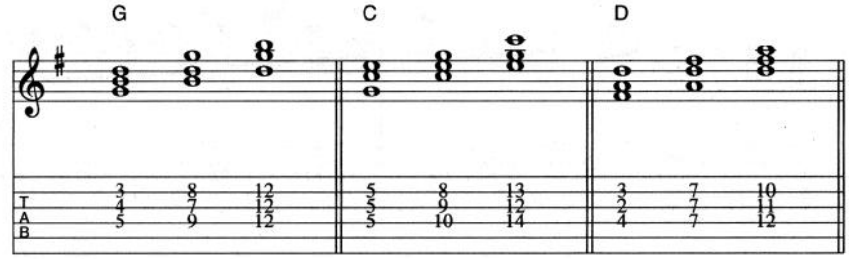
Run with it

Let's return to the pentatonic scale now with this arpeggiated approach in hand to see what we can turn up. **Ex. 13** is a particularly excellent I-IV maneuver in which you begin in *G*-minor pentatonic for the I chord and then slide up into a *C7* arpeggio, spelling out the IV7 chord. This move is then repeated an octave up. In measures 2 and 4, begin with a slide into *E♮*, the ♮3 of *C7*, followed by *G*, *C*, and *B♭*, the 5, root, and ♭7 of the chord. Measures 1 and 3 are strictly notes from your old pal the *G*-minor pentatonic scale.

Ex. 14 is also firmly rooted in *G*-minor pentatonic, but it includes just enough borrowed notes to "run the changes" on a swing through the V-IV-I-V turnaround of a blues in *G*. The pickup to measure 1 and measure 1 itself consist of *G*-minor pentatonic notes with an *F#* thrown in, the ♮3 of *D7*, to articulate the V chord. Coming out of measure 1 into measure 2, it's a chromatic climb up to *E♮*, the ♮3 of *C7* and the beginning of a *C7* arpeggio-based lick that lasts for the whole measure. The *G*-minor pentatonic lick at the return to the I chord in measure 3 ends with a hammer-on to the ♮3 of *G7* (*B♮*) before the hammer-on to *F#* during the final V chord in measure 4.

Ex. 15 is a chorus of *G* blues that pulls everything together. Measure 1 opens with *G*-minor pentatonic in the lowest possible position before the slide up into the next octave in measure 2. Measure 3 adds in *B♮* before the slide from *C* to *D* in measure 4 that takes you briefly up into a different position; then you return to hammer-on the ♮3. The measure closes with a chromatic pickup to *C7*'s *E♮*, and measure 5 continues with a *C7* arpeggio (*B♭*, *G*, *E*) with the 6 (*A*) and 2 (*D*) added before the triad-based chromatic lick in the first half of measure 6. The *G* triad in the second half of the measure

Ex. 8



Ex. 9

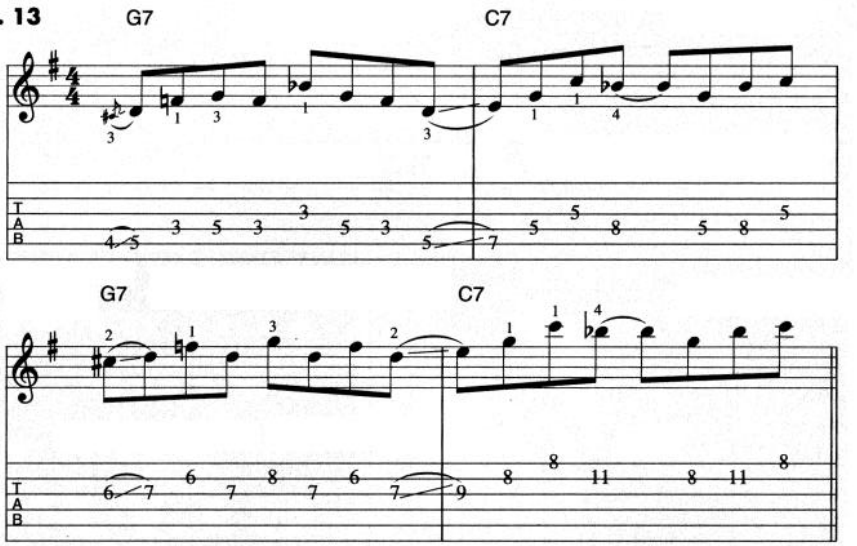
Ex. 10

Ex. 11

Ex. 12

anticipates the return to the I chord in measure 7; after hitting *G* at the 8th fret on the *B* string, there's a cool jump to the same note at the 12th fret on the *G* string, which kicks off a descending minor-pentatonic run that continues through the end of measure 8. Measure 9 features a *D*-major triad with a chromatic passing tone between the 2 and 3. Measure 10 begins with a *C7* lick, similar to measure 5, before a *G*-major triad leads into measure 11, another descending *G*-minor pentatonic run. There's more *G*-minor pentatonic in measure 12, but the addition of *F♯* lets you groove over the V chord in style before the slide into *B♮* that marks the return to *G* in the last measure. ■

Ex. 13



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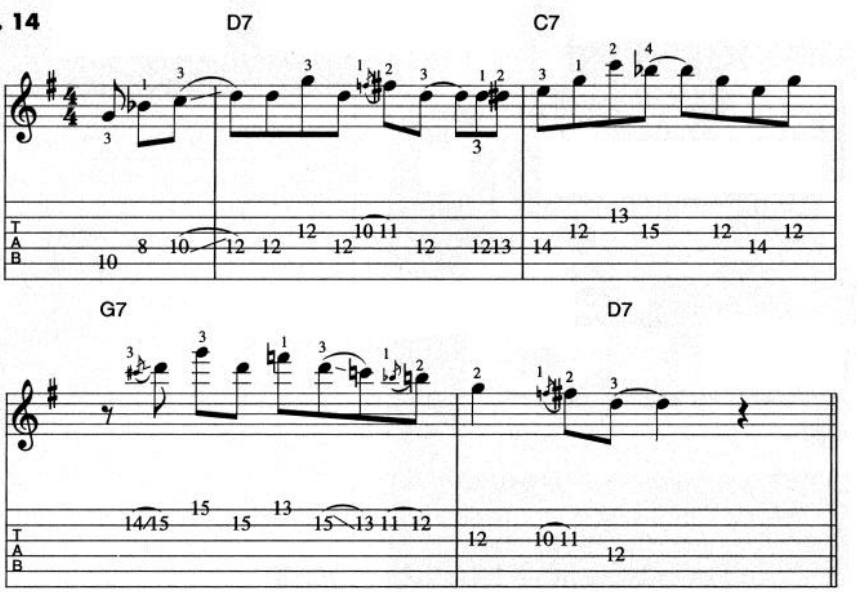
Ex. 14



Ex. 15